

Evaluating Tenure Cases for Scholars Active in Emergent or Non-mainstream IS research topics

Panel

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ABSTRACT

The number of topics and methods that our field is embracing is growing rapidly. This includes methodologies such as design science, analytics, neuro-IS and contextual areas such as healthcare IT or the public sector. This rapid expansion poses challenges for junior faculty engaged in this research, because external letter writers may struggle to understand how to evaluate their work. The outcomes of inquiry for these new methods or growing topics often vary from the “normal” metrics for productivity, such as journal publications, manifest in the broader IS discipline. How can we, as a field, develop a broader understanding of how to evaluate the tenure cases of individuals that use new methods or who investigate emerging topics? In this panel, we foster a conversation on how to, and if there is a need to, develop new metrics for evaluating tenure cases for scholars active in emergent or non-mainstream IS research topics.

Keywords

Tenure and Promotion, IS Discipline, Emergent Fields

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, many business schools view *MISQ* and *ISR* as the “gold standard” for calibrating the quality of junior Information Systems’ faculty research productivity. Typically, in addition to the “Top Two” IS outlets, colleges of business value high quality publications in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal* or *Management Science* that have earned spots on ranking lists assembled by lists in the London Financial Times or BusinessWeek. Anecdotal, one hears that top schools require junior faculty to publish two, three, or even as many as six publications in such high quality outlets to earn tenure.

Often, this narrow view of faculty productivity is found in college-level tenure documents, which many IS scholars resist. To capture the breadth of IS topics and methods, some senior faculty argue that we need to take broader view of what constitutes high quality work [1, 2] and value papers that appear in a more diverse set of outlets. For example, the AIS Senior Scholars have promoted a “Basket of Eight” journals as being representative of the highest quality IS focused refereed journals. By using this basket, many scholars maintain that tenure assessments can be more inclusive of IS topics and methods. Such an expansive view is important, because promotion and tenure decisions require senior IS faculty to carefully assess past productivity and the promise it holds for the future productivity [1].

Consistent with the field based view of faculty productivity, e.g., to be more inclusive of journals, Dean et al [3] offer evidence that many junior IS faculty members earn tenure at various levels of institutions by publishing outside the top ranked IS and business journals. They found that departmental lists, whether clearly described or communally understood by individuals within departments, are broader than expected. Thus, practically speaking, IS Departments appear to have embraced a broader array of journals.

As the IS Senior Scholars and the individuals in the IS community have argued for the need to value a broader range of journals, it is important to pause to consider the implications of such journal lists, and the signals they send, for the topics and methods employed by our junior faculty. For example, tenure-seeking faculty are aware their work will be evaluated by external reviewers [3]. This can persuade them to focus on the topics and methods perceived as most likely to appear in “listed” IS journals [4] or in other similarly ranked business journals. As a consequence, such lists may encourage homophily, encouraging young colleagues to select safe questions, the employ well accepted methods, and focus on well-defined outputs (e.g., journal papers), in the early stages of our junior colleagues’ careers[5].

Homophily in research questions, methods, and outputs could be a discouraging proposition for the IS field. The range topics and methodologies germane to understanding the role of information and information technology is growing rapidly. This can be evidenced by the rapid growth of research focused AIS Special Interest Groups. Since their inception in the early 2000s, AIS has approved more than 35 SIGs focused on diverse research topics such as Design Science, Analytics, Healthcare IS and Inclusion and so on are gaining popularity.

The outcomes of inquiry for these new or growing topics often vary from the “normal” metrics for productivity or publication found in the broader IS discipline. For example, a design scientist may value developing a useful and interesting IT artifact. Alternately, a necessary prerequisite for conducting healthcare IS research may be grants, which forces a young researcher to think in longer production cycles to produce refereed papers (e.g., they must first secure the grant, and then publish papers, which can take years). Further, a scholar interested in diversity and inclusion might measure success through founding new programs that attract and retain underserved populations to the IS field.

As a discipline then, while the senior scholars should be congratulated for expanding our definition of high quality journals, it is appropriate for the broader IS field to pause and reflect on how we define metrics for high quality IS scholarship. Should we? And can we? Promote metrics that are not based on refereed journal publications? Such as competitive research grants? Artifacts? Contributions outside the IS discipline? Or work rooted in inter-disciplinarity? If so, how can we best convey the importance of these new and emergent measures of productivity to promotion and tenure committees, IS department heads, and external letter writers, who evaluate tenure cases for scholars active in emergent or non-mainstream IS research.

This interactive panel promotes an open discussion between audience and panelists and among panelists on this topic. The panelists will consider the following questions when considering tenure cases.

1. How do we evaluate “impact” of scholarship that is practically relevant versus scholarship that speaks to more academic audiences?
2. How do we assess and give credit for non-traditional IS contributions such as:
 - Artifacts (new software products, algorithms, design principles)
 - Significant external funding
 - Conceptual models or frameworks that contribute to non-IS fields
 - Invitation to participate in elite study sessions such as the NSF, NIH
 - Multi-disciplinary work that includes the creation and leadership in special institutes, centers
3. How do we value “niche” elite journals such as *JAMIA* vis a vis “mainstream” elite journals such as *MIS Quarterly*?
4. If you work in a new topic area or with new methods, should you be required to hit “mainstream” elites?

POSITION STATEMENTS BY THE PANELISTS

Paulo Goes has served as department chair and in now dean at the College of Business at Arizona. He provides his perspectives as the past Editor-In-Chief of *MISQ* that ardently promoted through editorials and general promotion, the inclusion of various topics and methodologies.

Alok Gupta will provide his perspective as a design science researcher that has experienced the struggle and also as department chair who has presented tenure cases for design science researchers at Minnesota.

Arun Rai has served as the college promotion and tenure chair for nine years. He will share several experiences and insights in dealing with some of the issues enumerated above at the college level. Some of these issues are not necessarily idiosyncratic to IS and can also apply to other areas.

Monica Chiarini Tremblay is a department chair, and is also a researcher that has worked outside traditional IS fields. She will discuss the difficulty of conducting and receiving recognition for large federally funded grants. She will comment on working in the intersection of IS, Medical Informatics, Operations and Design Science and the difficulties to hiring for FIU’s a degree in health informatics.

BIO SKETCHES OF THE MODERATOR AND PANELISTS

Moderator: Jason Thatcher is a Professor in the Department of Management at Clemson University. Dr. Thatcher's research examines the influence of individual beliefs and characteristics on adaptive and maladaptive post-adoption information technology use. He also conducts funded work on how to develop tools to enable scholarly enquiry using real-time and archival data drawn from heterogeneous data studies such as online social networks, the congressional record and other sources which has resulted in the development of IT artifacts and was funded by the National Science Foundation, Salesforce.com, and IBM. He serves as President-Elect of the Association for Information Systems and Senior Editor at *MIS Quarterly*.

Arun Rai is Regents' Professor of the University System of Georgia, Robinson Chair of IT-Enabled Supply Chains and Process Innovation, and Harkins Chair of Information Systems, at the Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University. He co-founded the Center for Process Innovation that leverages interdisciplinary perspectives and industry-university partnerships to understand how IT innovation can address business and societal problems. His research has examined how firms can leverage information technologies in their strategies, interfirm relationships, and processes, and how systems can be successfully developed, implemented, and used. He serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *MIS Quarterly* and is a Fellow of the Association for Information Systems and a Distinguished Fellow of the INFORMS Information Systems Society.

Alok Gupta is Curtis L. Carlson Schoolwide Chair in Information Management and Associate Dean of Faculty and Research at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota. He also served as the chair of the Information and Decision Sciences Department at the Carlson School from 2005-2014. His research focuses on economics based design of systems, real-time system, design of online mercantile mechanisms, complex trading mechanisms, and large scale societal scale problems. He was awarded a prestigious NSF CAREER Award for his research on dynamic pricing mechanisms on the internet. He served as Senior Editor for ISR and currently serves as an Associate Editor for Management Science. In 2014 he was named an INFORMS Information Systems Society (ISS) Distinguished Fellow.

Paulo Goes is Dean and the Halle Chair in Leadership at the Eller College of Management, University of Arizona. He was previously Head of the Management Information Systems Department at the Eller College, and co-founded INSITE – Center for Business Intelligence and Data Analytics. His research interests are in the areas of design and evaluation of IT-enabled business models, big data analytics, innovation exploration, digital marketplaces, database technology and systems, and technology infrastructure. From 2013-2015 he served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, and was previously a Senior Editor of *Information Systems Research* and *Decision Sciences*. He was also recognized with the 2014 INFORMS Information Systems Society Distinguished Fellow Award.

Monica Chiarini Tremblay is the Department Chair of the Information Systems and Business Analytics at Florida International University College of Business. Dr. Tremblay's research has focused on data science and barriers to health technology adoption. She has worked on federal (Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, Veteran's Administration) and state grants (Agency for Healthcare Administration, Health Foundation of South Florida), resulting in three million dollars of funding in a three-year period. In 2012, Dr. Tremblay was elected as one of FIU Top Scholars. She serves as a study session member for the Healthcare Information Technology Research section of Agency Healthcare Research Quality/NIH (since 2009). Dr. Tremblay serves as a Senior Editor of the *Production and Operations Management Journal*, and as an AE for *Decision Sciences* and the *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

Overhead projector and screen for MS PowerPoint slides.

REFERENCES

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